

March 22, 2021

To: Douglas County Healthcare Providers

From: Adi M. Pour, PhD, Health Director

**Re: Update #5 on Vaccination of Priority Groups in Douglas County**

This is the fifth update for healthcare providers in Douglas County, Nebraska from the Douglas County Health Department (DCHD). Please see our other updates on the DCHD web page for healthcare providers at <https://www.douglascountyhealth.com/covid-19/109-covid-19/746-covid-19-health-care-providers> under "HEALTH ALERTS AND UPDATES."

Phase 2 vaccination (people under 65 and those with high risk conditions) begins Monday, March 22 **starting with people born in 1961 or before (at least 60 years old any time this calendar year)**. The State of Nebraska DHHS is requiring that ninety percent of allocations to local health departments go to age-based groups under 65 and ten percent to people with underlying medical conditions putting them at high risk of severe COVID-19 health outcome. The State has directed health care providers and local health departments to identify these patients. **See below for the approach taken by area health departments in conjunction with the Omaha Metropolitan Healthcare Coalition (OMHCC) for the counties of Douglas, Sarpy, Washington, Dodge, and Saunders.**

**Phase 2 (under 65 and those with high risk conditions)**

- **Age 60 and over** (by year of birth – 1961 and before) starts **Monday, March 22**.
- **Age 50 and over:** Groups will be added in 5-year increments as vaccine and appointment availability allow. Using this method ensures that the highest risk groups have a chance to get an appointment while avoiding web site crashes and concert-ticket-like difficulties in getting appointments.
- **Under 50 with high risk conditions** (will occur concurrently age-based eligibility) will also begin the week of March 22. Patients will be notified directly by health system facilities using information in electronic health record systems. There is no other way to get on this list. Doctor's notes will not be accepted so you do not need to provide these.
- It is the goal to open vaccination eligibility to **everyone** at least by May 1.

**Identification of people with high risk medical conditions by hospital/health system facilities (based on electronic records systems)**

A group of experts identified by the Omaha Metropolitan Healthcare Coalition (OMHCC) (for residents of the counties of Douglas, Sarpy, Washington, Dodge, and Saunders) worked together with local health departments to develop a process of identifying those at highest risk based on information in the electronic health records (EHRs) of the 4 major health systems in the area (Nebraska Medicine, Nebraska Methodist Health System, CHI Health System, and Children's Hospital and Medical Center). Patients with any visits to these systems within the past 2 years (including ED visits) will be included in the scoring. A risk score based on the presence of medical conditions known to be associated with risk for severe COVID-19 with a weight added for the [COVID-19 Vulnerability Index](#) (more info on this below) of the zip code of residence was developed and applied to data in the EHRs. Depending on the amount of vaccine available each week for this group, **patients with the highest risk scores will be contacted directly by healthcare system facilities with instructions on how to schedule an appointment.** Appointments will be at established community clinics, not at doctors' offices or

hospitals. More patients will be contacted each week by highest to lowest risk score. There is no other way to get patients on this list. Doctor's notes will not be accepted. Please remind patients that everyone over 50 years will be eligible within the next 2-3 weeks and then everyone else by at least May 1.

#### **Other key information about COVID-19 vaccination in Nebraska**

- All COVID-19 vaccinations are reported to the Nebraska State Immunization Information System (NESIIS) by the provider of the vaccination. Please do not enter a COVID-19 vaccination you did not provide into an EHR that interfaces with NESIIS based on patient report because it will cause duplication and will need to be manually deduplicated in NESIIS.
- **Vaccination records** – DCHD will not be providing proof of vaccination for people who lose their vaccination record cards. Patients who lose their cards will need to access their record directly from NESIIS ([https://nesiis-dhhs-prod.ne.gov/prd\\_ir/public/clientSearch.do?language=en](https://nesiis-dhhs-prod.ne.gov/prd_ir/public/clientSearch.do?language=en)) or from an EHR that can pull information from NESIIS.
- Until much more vaccine becomes available, individual healthcare providers cannot order vaccine for their own patients. Contact the Nebraska Immunization Program (402-471-6423, [dhhs.immunization@nebraska.gov](mailto:dhhs.immunization@nebraska.gov)) for more information.
- Patients will generally not be able to choose which vaccine they get. It is recommended that people take the first vaccine that is available to them. All COVID-19 vaccines are highly effective at preventing severe disease and death. Vaccines are also effective against variants.
- The COVID-19 Vulnerability Index (<https://c19hcc.org/resource/vulnerable-population>) utilizes the [CDC's Social Vulnerability Index](#) and incorporates COVID-19-related factors (including prevalence of high risk conditions in the population and access to healthcare resources). It also calculates the index by zip code area (ZCTA) which is available in patient medical records systems.
- The CDC Clinician Outreach and Communication Activity (COCA) (<https://emergency.cdc.gov/coca/index.asp>) has many educational webinars about the different vaccines, as well as many other topics.